

# CANINE CARE ACADEMY

Check list format covering all aspects of setting up a pet care business

Setting up a pet care  
business cheat sheet  
Alison Campbell

# Canine Care Academy

## Business start-up cheat sheet

This is a comprehensive check list for anyone starting up a pet care business, although it does transfer well to other small start-ups. There is no specific order in which you should approach these tasks, except for defining your business, which must come first. However, I advise you to think carefully about where you put your energy at the beginning.

Tasks and equipment are grouped into categories for ease of use, and each task/type of equipment is assigned one of FOUR statuses.

1. Those that are essential.
2. Those that are highly beneficial and therefore recommended.
3. Those that may add some value so are down to personal choice.
4. Those that are sometimes recommended but are outdated, unnecessary or provide little value.

### **Defining your business**

- Work out which services are compatible with you and your circumstances - do this first as everything else hinges on this. (1)
- Decide on a name. (1)
- Design a logo if you want one. (3)

### **Advertising and marketing**

- Work out who your [ideal client](#) is and how they will find you (1)
- Decide on a unique selling point that will appeal to your ideal client (2)
- Research what relationship marketing, content marketing and calls to action are. This is what marketing looks like in 2016. (1)
- Make an effort to understand basic SEO strategies, such as key words, linkage and valuable content. (1)
- Gather auto-generated (where a client adds the review themselves) reviews and testimonials from the outset. They REALLY count. Collect them on your own site, your Facebook page, Google my business and any of the other directories that you add a listing to. (1)
- Use these strategies to inform all your marketing efforts, both online and off. (1)
- Buy a domain name for your business website. (1 if you want a website)
- Find a web hosting service for your website. (1 if you want a website)

- Create a website using relevant keywords and lots of interesting content (not just business information), so that you can be found on Google. If at all possible, get involved with this so that you can update it yourself regularly. (1 if you want to grow a busy, to thriving business)
- Make sure the site is optimised for Mobile use. (1 if you have a website. This is essential or Google will penalise you).
- Create a free listing on [Google My Business](#) (used to be called Google Places). (2)
- Create other free listings on other business listing directories (don't pay for anything like this) [Cylex UK](#), [FreeIndex](#), [Business Magnet](#), [Thompson Local](#), [Touch Local](#), and [Scoot](#). (3)
- Create a Facebook page, so that you can be found on Facebook, and update it regularly with dog related videos, articles and photographs from around the web as well as your own content. NEVER use it *just* to try to sell your services - it's not called *social* media for nothing! (1 if you want to grow a busy, thriving business)
- Hold an event on Facebook that's attractive to all dog owners, for example, a free giveaway of some sort, in exchange for page likes and shares. This will get you started with a following. (2)
- Design and order advertising materials, such as business cards and postcards. (2)
- Get postcards and business cards placed into vet surgeries, and if you know any dog groomers, ask if they will do a card exchange for mutual recommendations to your clients. (3)
- Get outside, anywhere in your area where people are walking dogs, preferably with a dog of your own (borrow one if you don't have one). Tell people what you are doing and hand out cards. (2)
- If you find out about any local fun dog shows or similar, try to get yourself a little corner there, and create an attractive activity to get people involved (guess the number of dog treats in the jar kind of thing). Once you have them there you can tell them who you are, where you're based and pass over some information. At the very least attend with a pocket full of treats and business cards, and just circulate and talk to people.
- Create some garments that advertise your walking service. Most of us are either a uniform person or not. I'm not and I have never done this myself but I know that it has helped some people get into very interesting conversations and gain clients that way. Any relational marketing is good. (3)
- × Create flyers for door to door delivery. (4)

- × Paid advertisements in magazines, newspapers and similar. Not a good enough return on investment for our business. (4)
- × NEVER buy advertising, boosts on Google or space in magazines from anyone who calls you up without you asking them to. There are a number of scams in this sector that target new start-ups from their online information.

## **Vehicles**

- Decide what transport you will use and carefully consider what is fit for purpose, depending on what services you offer. You will definitely need some transport otherwise you will be limited to a small local area for your clients. (1)
- If you don't need a van, think about the door and boot sill height of different cars, from the ground. You don't want to be constantly lifting large dogs into the boot because they won't jump up. (2)
- Buy any necessary safety equipment to modify your vehicle for safe transportation of dogs. This could include, fixed cages, a boot crate, a boot guard, car harnesses, seat belt clips and a travel pod for smaller dogs. You'll need air conditioning and a good animal first aid kit, whatever vehicle you choose. Equipment may be minimal if you don't intend to routinely transport dogs in your car, but you still need to be prepared for an emergency. (1)
- Consider whether you want to add livery your van, use magnetic removable adverts or leave it blank. There are pros and cons for all of these so do a bit of research. 2016 has seen a spate of theft of multiple dogs from walkers' vans in the UK. You might feel this has some bearing on your decision. (3)
- Decide whether you will [claim transport costs](#) by the mile or as a percentage of use. You'll need to present your accounts differently depending on what option you choose. (1)
- Record all your mileage from the outset. (1)
- Change your vehicle insurance to include business use. (1)

## **Insurance and other legal stuff**

- Get full specialist pet business insurance for yourself and anyone who helps you in your business. This should cover third party liability, care and custody, accidental injury, and probably loss of cash and keys. You also need to consider personal injury insurance, which would cover some period of loss of earnings if you couldn't work after being injured

in the execution of your dog. It is extremely hard to get extra cover on house insurance if you home board for damage to possessions or the fabric of your house. Also remember, your pets and other members might need insurance if there is any possibility of them being injured. (1)

- DBS check, not a necessity but might bolster client trust in some cases, but I've only had two clients ask to see it in 5 years. Costs around £50 online for basic check which is all that's needed, however, you can apply for a statement of information held about you direct to your area force. This is the downloadable Northumbria Police [form](#) to do this. Using this method costs around £10 and takes a while but you will be sent an official document listing any cautions or convictions, so is enough for our purposes. (2)
- A Local Authority licence is needed if you want to look after any dogs in your home (day care or home boarding), and is issued after an inspection by an official from the council. Each authority issues a list of conditions of the licence but these can vary to a degree from area to area. The licence is renewed every year (in January) and varies greatly in cost. The range within our local area (North East) is between £42.40 and £150! (1)
- Brush up on [dog related laws](#). There are laws pertaining to control, using a lead in some areas, picking up faeces, entering land with livestock and so on. All dogs should be microchipped and have a collar and identity disc when out in public. Make sure you purchase some of these with your own ID on them for use when the dogs are in your care. (1)
- Get (or create) a set of business forms that are legally watertight – if you are unsure, get them checked – and make sure you cover: a contract of care, signed terms and conditions, vet release form, various disclaimers (such as off lead walking and dual boarding/day care, that is dogs from different households). (1)

## **Equipment**

NB These cover all in-home and out of the home services; you may not need them all, but some you might want to keep in both your car and your home.

## Feeding

- A small bag of high quality chicken and rice dog food – as this is relatively unlikely to cause digestive issues or reactions – for emergency use. (2)
- Few trays of quality wet food like Forthglade, Naturediet or Wainwrights, to use to tempt a dog to eat if they are reluctant. (2)

- Lots of small treats for relationship building and reward. (1)
- A selection of bowls of different sizes including large stable water bowls for in-home use. Don't rely on what your clients bring as they might forget, or bring an inappropriate bowl for your needs. (1)
- A water bottle with attached drinking surface for outdoor use, especially in warm weather. (1)

### Walking

- A selection of 2 point (chest attachment and shoulders attachment) [harnesses](#) and a number of double ended leads, dependant on how many dogs you might have on the lead at any one time. These will add enormous value to your walking life. For any dog who pulls or needs extra guidance and control they are excellent, but are a comfortable way to walk any dog. They remove potential neck strain and damage, caused by tugging on collars, but prevent the 'sledging pull', that the back-attachment-only harnesses allow. Also greatly reduce the risk of strain and injury to the walker. Widely accepted as a kind and positive training aid, so removes any issues the owner might have with some other types of equipment, especially the head collars and figure of 8 leads. (2)
- Alternatives walking equipment to the above if preferred. (2)
- Collar tags with your contact details and small sprung clips to attach securely and remove easily. (1)
- A treat bag can be useful. Don't forget the treats! (3)
- A water bottle with attached drinking surface for outdoor use, especially in warm weather. (1)
- Some kind of bag, bum bag, soft messenger bag that's comfortable to wear and can hold all your other walking equipment while you are walking. (1)
- Basic first aid equipment: some antiseptic wipes, a dressing with integral bandage, scissors, tape. (2)
- Carry packs of tissues (2)
- Hand sanitiser. (2)
- Poo bags (1) Tip: if you are clearing multiple poos from a garden, use a good quality plastic glove on your leading hand and one large poo bag in your other hand and you'll be able to get away with just one or two bags.
- Small LED torch if walking in the dark. (1)
- Spare lead if using a flexi, in case of lead failure. (2)
- Key chain or mechanism for attaching your client keys to your person (1)
- Mobile phone (1)

## Playing

- A [good selection](#) of balls, Safestix, Frisbees and tug toys for outdoor use. (1)
- A [good selection](#) of indoor toys; indestructible bones, Kongs, treat balls, tug toys and puzzles. The links lead to some of those I would recommend after years of really fun research, living and playing with hundreds of dogs. (1)
- Bigger garden items, such as, a sand pit, water 'pool', hammocks etc. (2)
- A whole load of free destructible items, like carpet inner tubes, huge card boxes, plastic bottles (caps removed) and such like. (2)

## Sleeping

- Crate pads if you have car or house crates. If a dog is crated for longer periods you should add bedding; cot duvets, dog blankets etc. Many owners will bring bedding if their dog is staying overnight, but you will need spares in case of accidents or forgetful owners! (1)
- Flat dog beds are excellent for adding extra sleeping places around the house. Sofa throws will protect your furniture to a degree. (2)
- × More enclosed beds are very size specific and probably best avoided unless you only take (for example) small dogs. (4)

## Cleaning and grooming

- Lots** of old towels of various sizes. Dark colours best. Can often be found at cheap prices in Oxfam shops. (1)
- A general purpose grooming brush that's easy to clean. (2)
- A general purpose grooming comb that's easy to clean. (2)
- Some dry shampoo or pet wipes (keep some in car too) in case anyone rolls in fox poo (ewwww!) (2)
- A gentle dog shampoo in case you need to bath anyone. (2)
- Pack of disposable gloves for cleaning up anything yukky, cat litter trays, cleaning out birds and small animals etc. (2)

## First aid

- Good medium sized animal first aid kit. (1)
- Pack of disposable gloves. (1)
- Pack of disinfectant wipes. (1)

## Containment

- Safety gates across your stairs, or between rooms in the house. (1)

- Good quality fencing around the perimeter of your garden, and possibly to section off areas of your garden as well. (1)
- Small crate – can contain little ones in the car. (2)
- Large crate – useful den if covered over with a duvet or similar for use in high anxiety situations such as bonfire night. Door open. Also doubles up for housing crate trained dogs at night. Don't crate a dog who isn't used to this, and never without the owners expressed permission. (2)

### Office supplies

- Smart phone, to access records when out and about, take photos for clients and such like. (1)
- Laptop, iPad or PC for admin of accounts, pet sitter software or client records, website, Facebook marketing, forms etc. (1)
- Printer to make copies of forms and other documents. (1)
- A4 paper and printer ink. (1)
- A5 (comfortable size) working diary. (2)
- Large whiteboard and pens if you don't use software. (2)
- Business cards (lots). (1)
- Postcards (few). (2)
- Client diaries (notebooks) and pens. To be left in client's house. (2)

### **Accounts and HMRC**

- You need to register your business with [HMRC](#) by October 5th in your second tax year. For example, if you begin trading during the tax year 6th April 2015 to 5th April 2016, then the latest you can register and be certain of no penalties is October 5th 2016. However, it is best to register as soon as possible so that you are prepared for the process of submitting your first tax return. (1)
- When you first register your business you will also register for Class 2 NICs. These are paid once you make a profit of more than £5,965 per annum, at a rate of £2.70 per week in two 6 monthly instalments by direct debit. (1)
- Record all income and expenditure using [cash basis accounting](#). That is, record the date you actually receive money in, and the date you actually spend it for each item in real time. Your invoices to clients are one record of income, but they won't match cash basis accounting as they will be generated ahead of payment. Receipts you are given when you make purchases are the 'proof' of expenditure, and are usually dated. (1)

- Work out how you will send generate invoices and send these to clients. (1)
- Work out how you will generate receipts of payment and send these to clients. (1)
- Make sure you understand what counts as an [expense against tax](#). (1)
- Decide how you are going to keep financial records. Software like [Pet Sitter Plus](#), will do virtually all your admin and accounting. If you favour hard copy you may want an [accounting record book](#). (1)
- Register for [Self Assessment online](#). You need to do this at least 10 days before you want to do your tax return online, but you can do it when you register your business, so that you don't forget. After registering you will be sent a code in the post to be able to use your account. That's why you need to register in advance of doing your return. (1)

### **Administration systems**

Set up systems that will allow you avoid all of the following. Think through each point and work out how you are going to make it impossible for this to happen in your business. [Pet Sitter Plus](#) software would go a long way to solving many of these issues for you, but whatever you decide you need to put fool proof systems in place, as reputation rest on reliability and excellent service.

- Double booking.
- Dog incompatibilities.
- Missed appointments.
- Missed care.
- Walks or visits booked for wrong day or time.
- Sleeping in.
- Lack of information about an animal in your care.
- Clients not turning up for their pets when you expect them.
- Clients turning up with their pets when you don't expect them.
- Forgotten medication.
- Missed receipts of payment.
- Unpaid invoices.

### **Other trouble shooting systems**

Set up systems that will allow you avoid all of the following. Think through each point and work out how you are going to make it unlikely for this to happen in your business.

- Escapee dogs.
- Illness (you being unable to work).

- Dogs eating things that cause them harm.
- Indoor cats getting outside.
- Outdoor cats not coming in at night.
- Dog fights.
- Animal bites.
- Lost keys.
- Dogs stolen from outdoor areas.
- Dogs stolen from vans or vans stolen with dogs in them.
- Vehicle accidents.
- Dogs slipping collars or harnesses.
- Leads failing.